The Diamond Sutra

Dear sangha, today is the 11 December 1997, we are in the New Hamlet in the Winter Retreat. We will continue to study the Diamond Sutra.

The Buddha asked Subhuti "What do you think Subhuti, can you recognise the Tathagata through form?" This is a test question, he asks it to make sure that Subhuti has understood the teaching. Subhuti said: "No, World Honoured One, it is impossible to perceive the Tathagata by means of form. Because what the Tathagata calls form is not in fact form, that is why it is called form" (section 5). A is not A, therefore it is truly A. Subhuti has learned the language, the dialectic of the Diamond Sutra. He has learned that the teaching of the Diamond Sutra is not the same as the principle of identity. The dialectic of the Diamond Sutra is: A is not A, therefore it is truly A.

When the Buddha heard Subhuti say that form is not form, therefore it is truly form, the Tathagata knows that Subhuti is about to understand his teaching, and he says: "In a place where there is something that can be distinguished by signs, in that place there is deception. If you can see the sign-less nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata."(5) So when you can see the non-A elements in A then you can see the true A. When you see the non-form of everything then you can see the Tathagata. This phrase is very beautiful, very well known.

When the Venerable Subhuti saw the depth of the teaching, he saw that it is not difficult for him to understand the sutra because he is able to sit in front of the Buddha and be guided by him. So he wondered what will happen 500 years from now. How will people understand this teaching: "When you see the non-form of the Tathagata you can see the Tathagata?" So he asked the question: "World Honoured One, today it is not difficult for me to hear this wonderful sutra, have confidence in it, understand it, accept it, and put it into practice. But in the future, in 500 years, if there is someone who can hear this sutra, have confidence in it, understand it and put it into practice, then certainly the existence of someone like that will be great and rare."(14) He really cares for the future generations. Subhuti asked: "In times to come, will there be people who, when they hear these teachings, have real faith and confidence in them?" And the Buddha said: "Do not speak that way, Subhuti. Five hundred years after the Tathagata has passed away, there will still be people who enjoy the happiness that comes from observing the precepts. When such people hear these words, they will have faith and confidence that here is the truth."(6) So according to the teaching of the Tathagata, if we practise virtue and keep the precepts, then thanks to caring for those good seeds, we have enough conditions and the opportunity to understand the deep teachings of the Buddha. "We should know that such people have sown seeds not only during the lifetime of one Buddha, or even two, three, four or five Buddhas, but have in truth planted wholesome seeds during the lifetimes of tens of thousands Buddhas."(6)

When we listen to this we see that the Buddha's teaching is a very rich field of merit, that the Buddha is a good place where we can sow our seeds of virtue. When we have good seeds and we sow them in that field then very soon we will harvest a lot of fruit. We have the seeds, we have time, youth, ideals, love, willingness; all of these are good seeds. What do we take refuge in? Where do we sow those seeds? Many young people don’t know the field where they sow their seeds, so they cannot harvest much. So, do the young people know the right place to sow their seeds? The Buddha is the best field in the world in which you can sow your seeds. And if you know how to sow those seeds, very soon you will harvest a lot of fruit from that field. Practising the precepts, practising virtue, that is sowing seed in the rich field of the Tathagata. And the people who have the opportunity to listen to the teaching of the Buddha are the people who have sown wholesome seeds in many Buddhas in the past. That is why they have the chance to get in touch with the rich teaching of the Buddha. Perhaps for many people who listen to this teaching it is just like a cow listening to music; they don’t understand its meaning. Fifty years ago many scholars in the West who read the Diamond Sutra didn't understand it and said that the Buddha is speaking nonsense, the sutra doesn't have any meaning, and is very insignificant.

"Anyone who for only a second gives rise to a pure and clear confidence upon hearing these words of the Tathagata, the Tathagata sees and knows that person, and he or she will attain immeasurable happiness because of this understanding."(6) Listening to these teachings, which are difficult to understand and appreciate, if we can understand and believe even for one moment then we will be known and seen by the Tathagata. "Why? Because that kind of person is not caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life-span."(6) This is a very beautiful sentence. When we can understand for just one moment, then suddenly the Tathagata knows and sees us and we have a strong source born in us and we receive support and strength from the Buddha.

According to optical science when we have a reflective mirror and we can see the eye of someone in the mirror then we know that person can also see us. I see the eye that sees me. When we sit in a car and we look in the rear view mirror, if the person in the back seat can see the driver’s eyes in the mirror it means that the driver can also see him. So when we see the Buddha it means the Buddha is seeing us also. The teaching in the sutra is very clear, that whoever can see the non-form of every form can see the Tathagata. If you are able to see the non-mark elements in the mark then you can see the Tathagata. And when you can see the Tathagata and the Tathagata can see you and recognise you, then suddenly the energy of the Tathagata will enter you, and within you there will be a strong source of energy, because you have the strong support of the Buddha, of the Tathagata. If you see the Tathagata don't say you don't understand the Tathagata . If you understand your friend then your friend suddenly will understand you. Whatever student can understand their teacher, can see the heart of their teacher, then the teacher can also understand him or her, and the energy of the teacher will be transmitted to the student very strongly. When you don't understand your teacher then your teacher cannot see you. You feel this energy that is transmitted to you, and it is the same in the Sutra.

"That kind of person is not caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being or a life span. They are not caught up in the idea of a dharma or the idea of a non-dharma. They are not caught up in the notion that this is a sign and that is not a sign."(6) The Buddha already spoke of the four marks of self, person, living being and life span. Now he introduces four more notions: dharma, non-dharma; sign, no sign. This is another branch coming out from the tree, an extension of this teaching. Dharma is phenomena, things, objects of our perception. Those things appear, they have their own mark, and the mark is the object of our perception. Form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharma; all of these are phenomena, the objects of our consciousness.

Our perception gives us the impression that there is a dharma. For example when we look at a rose we think that there is a rose, we have the notion of a rose. But when we overcome the notion of rose we may come to the notion of non-rose, from the notion of dharma we go to the notion of non-dharma. But non-rose, non-dharma is also just a concept or notion. The rose appears in our perception as a dharma, a thing. We have been taught that we have to be careful, because the sign, the mark, is dangerous, deceptive, we must not to grasp it but must transcend it. So then you say that the rose is just an image, an illusion, that actually there is no rose, no dharma. So from the extreme of "dharma" we have gone to another extreme, that of "non-dharma" We want to transcend one idea but then we get caught in another idea, another notion. We need to transcend both of the extremes, both are wrong perceptions. That is why we should not get caught in the notion of dharma or the notion of non-dharma, the notion that this is a sign or that is not a sign. When we are able to escape from the notion of sign then we can get caught into the notion of non-sign. But non-sign is also a notion, a concept, it's the same as the idea of existence and non-existence.

The sutra tells us, "If you are caught up in the idea of a dharma, you are also caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living

being, and a life span. If you are caught up in the idea that there is no dharma, you are still caught up in the ideas of a self, a person, a living being and a life-span."(6) Any idea, any notion has to be transcended, whether it is a notion of dharma or non-dharma, sign or no sign, being or non-being. "That is why we shouldn't get caught up in dharmas or in the idea that dharmas do not exist." We shouldn't get caught up in the notion of a dharma, but we shouldn't get caught up in the notion of non-dharma either. "This is the hidden meaning when the Tathagata says: 'Bhiksus, you should know that all of the teachings I have given to you are a raft.' All teachings (Dharma) must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings."(6) This last sentence is a very famous sentence of the Diamond Sutra. The Buddha uses a metaphor, comparing the teachings to a raft. The Sanskrit word "dharma" has at least two meanings. The first is the word dharma meaning things, the second is the word Dharma meaning the teachings. The Diamond Sutra talks about both of these meanings. The word dharma is like the rose we talked about a while ago. The word Dharma in the above sentence means the teachings, being compared to a raft. All of the monks and the nuns should learn the Chinese original and be able to write the characters of this sentence. In the past I learned the Diamond Sutra page by page from a book just like this one (in Chinese).

This sentence comparing the teachings to a raft is very famous. If we read the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake we see the same sentence; it has its root in that sutra. In that sutra the Buddha taught that you have to be very careful and skilful when you learn his teachings. If you are not intelligent then you will be caught by the teaching, and when you are caught by the teaching you will lose the meaning of the teaching. It is just like a person unskilled in catching a snake, he catches the snake by the tail, so the snake can turn around and bite him. But if he knows how to catch the snake, just behind the head, it will not bite him.

So it's the same with the teachings. If you are caught by the teachings you cannot be transformed, you cannot practice. You have to be very intelligent and very careful about receiving the teachings. So, the teachings that I give now, please do not be caught by them. "All teachings must be abandoned, not to mention non-teachings." It says in the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake that if we are caught by the non-teaching it is very dangerous. So the Diamond Sutra has taken the teaching from that sutra and tells us we should not be caught by the Dharma and we should not be caught by the non-Dharma either, in both the meanings of the word dharma: objects and teachings.

We say that the Dharma is very precious. But if we are caught by ideas then the Dharma becomes an obstacle to our practice. Just like someone who wants to cross the river. He needs to make a raft. But if he thinks the raft is so beautiful that he carries it on his head and does not want to cross the river, or if after he crosses the river he puts the raft on his head and walks away with it, that is ridiculous. The raft has served its purpose, it's no longer useful. The same with the teachings. The teachings are helping us. If we keep the teaching, if we boast about it, then it does not have any use. We should use the teaching like a raft to bring us across the river. And then when we've crossed the river we can leave the raft there for someone else to use.

If we look at ourselves we see we are more or less like that person. We learn a little bit of the teaching, we think we understand it, and we are proud that we are able to get in touch with the teaching. We think that the teaching is number one, the best. But if we don't want to use the teaching to cross the river, then we are that stupid person, nothing less. After I'd been studying the Diamond Sutra for twenty years I got in touch with the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake. Then I knew that the Diamond Sutra has it's origin in the Sutra on the Better Way to Catch a Snake. The French publisher has just put the two sutras together to make the book Thundering Silence.

So we should not be caught by the raft, and we shouldn't pursue the non-Dharma either. If we get caught in the non-teachings then we are also caught, we are not liberated. Being caught in the idea of non-Dharma is even more dangerous than being caught in the idea of the Dharma. For example when we are caught in the idea of "being" the Buddha taught many ways for us to overcome and transcend the idea of "being". But when we get caught in the idea of "non-being" then that is even more dangerous. In the Ratnakuta Sutra the Buddha says that it's better to be caught in the idea of being than to be caught in the idea of non-being. When you are caught in the idea of being you can use the idea of non-being to cure that sickness, but once you are caught in the idea of non-being you cannot overcome it with the idea of being. So you have to overcome both the idea of being and the idea of non-being. You should not be caught in the idea of a sign, a mark. But you also should not be caught in the idea of signlessness. Even if the Buddha has taught that if you can see the signless nature of signs, then you can see the Tathagata. We have a tendency to grasp at the signless when we leave the sign. That is the teaching of the Tathagata, and we can see it more clearly later on in the sutra.

"What do you think, Subhuti, has the Tathagata arrived at the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind?"(7) So, the Buddha tests Subhuti once more to see if he understands the teaching deeply. The Buddha asked: "What do you think Subhuti? In ancient times when the Tathagata practised under Buddha Dipankara did he attain anything?" Subhuti answered: "No, World Honoured One, he did not attain anything."(7) The Buddha Dipankara was a teacher of the Tathagata. Dipa means the torch, it also means island. The Buddha asks Subhuti two consecutive questions in order to test his understanding, now he is not caught in the notion of attaining or not-attaining.

"What do you think, Subhuti? Does a bodhisattva create a serene and beautiful Buddha field?"(10) Everyone thinks that a bodhisattva is one who makes the land of the Buddha more beautiful every day so that other people can come and be happy. Very often we think that the responsibility of the bodhisattva is to adorn, to beautify the land of the Buddha. Just like our practice centre of Plum Village. This is just like a small Buddha land and in Plum Village, in the Upper Hamlet, the Lower Hamlet, the New Hamlet, everywhere there are bodhisattvas who would like to make the village more beautiful so that the retreatants can come and can be happier. These bodhisattvas might plant more trees or build more rest rooms, or decorate the rooms and make them more beautiful and comfortable for the guests. There is a bodhisattva who thinks that we need to be fresh and to smile so that the practice centre can be more beautiful. That is called adorning the Buddha land. If every day we are angry, we are sad, we put our garbage into our practice center and it will not be more beautiful, and the retreatants who come to us will not be happy. Day after day our practice centre loses its Buddha character and we are polluting the Buddha land. The bodhisattvas are the ones who practice beautifying the Buddha lands every day.

Subhuti replied: "No, World Honoured One. To create a serene and beautiful Buddha field is not in fact creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field. That is why it is called creating a serene and beautiful Buddha field." So Subhuti repeats the formula of the Diamond Sutra: A is not A, therefore it is true A. That means that a bodhisattva while he is adorning the Buddha land is not caught by the idea that he is the only person who is beautifying the land and that the other person is not. Such a person is not really a bodhisattva. Someone like that is basing his work on a perception of self, person, living being and life-span, therefore they are not a true bodhisattva and their merit is small. At the same time there are other people who work without being caught by the idea of self. They don't discriminate between themselves and others, they don't see that they are making the village more beautiful and that other people are wasting their time. So the bodhisattva is not caught in the idea of a self. They can see the non-A elements in A. When we beautify the Buddha land and we still see that we are beautifying the Buddha land then we are not beautifying the Buddha land. We should use Buddhist psychology to help us understand this.

In Buddhist psychology we are given the teaching of the three natures, the trisvabhava. When we look at something we first of all see the first nature that is called vikalpa, the nature of discrimination. For example we see a person and at our first look we see that that person is not us, we are different from that person. For example when we hear about a car accident which has just happened in Bordeaux in which three person died, our first reaction is how lucky we are that we are not those three people. That is the nature of discrimination. Or when we hear the news that a person has cancer and we feel lucky and happy that we are not that person. That is the nature of discrimination, because it is based on the discrimination between ourselves and the other person. When we look deeply into that person we will see that that person is related to us, lives near us. If around us many people have cancer, then we have also been exposed to the causes of cancer, because we are related to these people very closely and we have the same environment. When the right hand looks at things it very naturally overcomes the nature of discrimination. The right hand never says: "The left hand is wounded, I am not wounded." It never has the nature of discrimination

in its perception. And it sees that when the left hand is wounded it is just as if the right hand is wounded.

Do you know how many US soldiers died in Vietnam during the time the US was involved in the Vietnam War? About 50,000 American soldiers died in Vietnam. And that war lasted for ten years. In car accidents every year in the US over 50,000 people die. That's every year, not every ten years. So in ten years 500,000 people in the US pass away in car accidents. Some people who drive are agitated, they drink, they're not careful in their driving. In Texas they investigated and found out that 43% of the car accidents are alcohol related. So, when we hear of a car accident we think that it is nothing related to us. But perhaps today or tomorrow we might have an accident. We think the other person who is in a car accident is not us, but when we look deeply, we see that it could be us very soon. So, it's not the problem of the other person alone, but it's truly our problem. At first we discriminate between the other person and ourselves. But when something happens to the other person it happens to us. It happened to them yesterday, but it can happen to us today. So when we look with the nature of discrimination we don't see the truth. When we see A with the nature of discrimination we will not see A truly. So we have to train ourselves to look into A with a view of non-A. We need to look, seeing the nature of interdependence, interbeing; "this is because that is", things arise because of each other. This is the nature of interdependent origination (paratantra).

Paratantra means every thing bases on other things to help it to manifest. Just like when we look into a rose. At first we think a rose is only a rose. But if we look deeply into a rose we see that a rose can only be made up of non-rose elements, like the earth, the water, the air, the sunshine, the fertiliser. We begin to see the non-rose elements and we see that the rose is made up of the non-rose elements. The rose has to base itself on the sunshine, the fertiliser, the hard work of the farmer, and many, many things, for it to manifest. So the manifestation of one is based on the presence of all others.

If you look carefully into me you will see my teacher, the Tu Hieu Temple, the Buddha. So, if when you see me, you can see the other elements that are not me, then you truly can see me. You have to train yourselves to look in this way, you look at other people with interbeing eyes, then you can see the true nature of everything. When you look into A you should see the non-A elements, when you practice deeply with the eyes of interdependent origination, you can discover the true nature of A. True nature is also called the nature in itself, the nature per se, the nature of perfection, the true reality, or suchness. In Sanskrit it's nispanna. When we look into A and we are caught in the four notions of self, human being, living being and life span, then we are deceived by our way of looking. So we have to train ourselves with interbeing eyes to see the non-A elements in A and then the truth begins to reveal itself to us. If our practice is deep we can see the true nature of A. There is false A and true A. So we arrive at the Diamond Sutra formula of A is non-A, therefore A is really A.

It's the same when practising the six paramitas. If you practise according to the four notions of self, human being, living being and life-span, then you are not truly a bodhisattva. You are seeking praise, recognition, fame, but this is not true liberation, this is not the true practice. "Moreover, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva practises generosity, he does not rely on any object, that is to say he does not rely on any form, sound, smell, taste, touch or dharma to practise generosity. That, Subhuti, is the spirit in which a bodhisattva should practise generosity, not basing on signs. Subhuti, if a bodhisattva does not rely on any concept when practising generosity, then the happiness that results from that virtuous act is as great as space, it cannot be measured. Subhuti, the bodhisattvas should let their minds dwell in the teachings I have just given."(4) So the answer to Subhuti's first question is that in order to give rise to bodhicitta, a bodhisattva should not base on signs, but should base on these teachings.

Teacher is a form, friend is a form, house and garden is also a form. In order to nourish your bodhicitta you shouldn't base on form. Many people give rise to bodhicitta because they are attracted by a form, a sound, a smell, a taste, or a dharma, and they don't see deeply into those forms, sounds, smells, tastes, touches, and dharmas. So that is why after a time they have the feeling that they are deceived, they are tricked, betrayed, and so they leave the path. It is the same in normal life. We are all looking for the good, the true, the beautiful. We have the feeling that we don't have those elements within ourselves, and that is why we are searching. In the world outside we are betrayed many times, and then when we come into the church or the temple we are deceived again. It presents itself as having the good, the beautiful and the true, but sometimes those elements are absent, so we have the feeling that we are cheated, we are betrayed again. So we have to learn to look deeply and break through. You have to look into the non-form elements, you have to discover the things behind the form, sound, smell, taste, and touch, and then you can understand. And when you understand you accept it completely, because you are not deceived anymore. We no longer try to escape, we don't run away any more.

Bodhisattvas should not base their bodhicitta on form, sound, smell, taste, touch, and dharmas. They should base their bodhicitta on non-attachment. "So, Subhuti, all the bodhisattva mahasattvas should give rise to a pure and clear intention in this spirit. When they give rise to this intention they should not rely on forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects or objects of mind. They should give rise to that intention with their minds not dwelling anywhere."(10) That means that you do not base your bodhicitta on the thinking that is based on form. "So, Subhuti, when a bodhisattva gives rise to the unequalled mind of awakening, he has to give up all ideas. He cannot rely on forms when he gives rise to that mind, nor on sounds, smells, tastes, tactile objects or objects of mind. He can only give rise to that mind that is not caught up in anything."(14) So, the bodhisattva who would like to give rise to bodhicitta should not rely on form, the form of self, person, living being, and life-span.

"The Tathagata has said that all notions are not notions, and that all living beings are not living beings. Subhuti, Tathagata is the one who speaks of things as they are, speaks what is true, and speaks in accord with reality, he does not speak deceptively or to please people. Subhuti, if we say that the Tathagata has realised a teaching, that teaching is neither graspable nor deceptive."(14) If there is any dharma that we have obtained, then that is not the true dharma. So, does the Tathagata obtain the dharma? Subhuti said there is no dharma that the Tathagata has gained or obtained: "According to what I understand from the teachings of the Buddha, there is no attaining of anything called the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind."(17)

The idea of true gives rise to the idea of false and the idea of false gives rise to the idea of true. In the spirit of the Diamond Sutra we should see that there are pairs of notions, pairs of opposite ideas like self and non-self. We want to transcend the idea of self but then we can be caught into the idea of non-self. So the problem is that we have to transcend them both. There's the idea of human being and the idea of non-human being. There is the idea of living being and non-living being. We discriminate that those two are two separate things, but those two are interbeing, they are interpenetrating. Like in the compost we can see the flower and in the flower we can see the compost.

The idea of life-span, form, non-form, mark, non-mark, dharma, non-dharma, birth, death, coming, going, being, non-being, one, many; there are many opposite pairs of notions. The idea of true and the idea of false, of true awakening and false awakening. We think that true is not false. But if we don't see the non-true elements in what is true then it is not really the truth. We are grasping an idea of true and grasping an idea of false; that is very dangerous. So we have to transcend all of the opposite pairs of ideas, even the idea of true and false.

"Subhuti, a bodhisattva who still depends on notions to practice generosity, is like someone walking in the dark. He will not see anything. But when a bodhisattva does not depend on notions to practise generosity, he is like someone with good eyesight walking under the bright light of the sun. He can see all shapes and colours."(14) When we see something and our seeing is based on ideas and concepts, if we practice dana in relation to that way of seeing, then that is not true practice. Anyone who practices giving has to look with their eye that is not attached to the nature of discrimination, and then they can see the true nature of life.

When we practice dana we don't see that we are the one who gives and the other is the one who receives. We're not proud of that action. We don't require the other person to feel gratitude or respect toward us. Among us there are many people who feel betrayed. The other person has lived with us for 30 years. That person has made a great vow, a promise, a great commitment, saying that they will live with us forever. But now this person has changed their mind and has gone to follow another person. We have the feeling that we have been betrayed, and we suffer because of that. We say that we are the loyal person, we are the

person who has not made any mistake. The other person is the unloyal person, the person who has changed and who is causing a lot of suffering, and within ourselves we have a lot of enmity toward that person. But this has come about because during the time we have lived with that person we have not loved according to spirit of the Diamond Sutra. Even though the two people live together they are two separate islands. They are separated because of the idea of self, person, living being, and life span. So we have not loved the other person while being in touch with their suchness, we have not loved in the spirit of non-attachment, non-grasping. So that is why things have happened like this.

We love but we require that the other person has to love us back. We ask the other person to remember our help and we calculate every little bit of our hard work. We measure and weigh our hard work and we say I loved you so many kilograms, but you are terrible, you have not returned my love ten or twenty percent. So in our relationship with another person we behave like that, with discrimination in our mind, so our happiness is not very great. We cannot be one with the other person. The two persons who love each other are still two isolated realities. We are not the other person. We don't see the other person in us. We don't see that the other person is ourselves.

We cannot see ourselves clearly and we cannot see the other person clearly. We see the seed of loyalty within ourselves but we cannot see the seed of betrayal within ourselves. We cannot see that the seed of loyalty is also there in the other person. How have we lived together? How have we neglected the other person? We have not watered the seed of loyalty in the other person and we allow the seed of betrayal to be watered every day by the way we eat, talk, walk, smile, interact, while doing so we are caught in discrimination.

So the love is not great enough to keep both of us. Because when we look into ourselves we see only A, we cannot see the non-A elements within ourselves. We look into the other person and we see A only as A and we cannot see the non-A elements within him or her. So our interaction is very shallow, not very deep, and our love and our happiness are not deep, not profound. Change cannot be avoided, it has to happen, and now we blame the other person. The other person is responsible to a certain degree. But if we know that the other person is us, then we take care and protect the other person just like we take care of ourselves. Perhaps we don't even know how to take care of ourselves, protect ourselves. The Buddha has said that if we know how to protect ourselves, to take care of ourselves, then we are able to take care of the other person. We haven't known how to take care of ourselves. So perhaps we are responsible for what has happened to a certain degree. So we should not blame. All of our blaming is based on discrimination.

We have not learned to look deeply into the dharma so that we can see the non-dharma within the dharma. When we look into A, we cannot see the non-A elements within it, so we don't see deeply, we don't completely understand the nature of the reality of A. So every day we make mistakes, every day we commit wrong actions and that causes the results we are having right now.

Very often when we suffer, we have the tendency to blame the other person. We don't see that the other person has acted in such a way partly because of us. The other person is only a mirror reflecting us. If we are able to smile then the mirror would be able to smile back to us. The environment we live in is our own mirror. If we smile into the mirror then we get the smile back, if we frown then the mirror will frown back. Why can't we embrace that person, while the other people who live with him or her can? Is it because we don't have love, we lack understanding? We think that our suffering is due to the other person, but the main reason is that we are not able to embrace the other person. If we are able to love the other person, then this shows in our eyes, in our smile, in the way we act, and then we will be loved and we will receive love back.

So the practice is that we have to look deeply so that we can see the non-A elements in A. If we can see the non-A elements in A then we have the chance to see the true A, the suchness of A, the A of nispanna. This is not a theory, this is not an intellectual conception, it is a practice. During the time the Buddha lived and practised he also had a lot of difficulties. But the Buddha overcame these difficulties because his capacity of looking deeply was very profound. This is why the Buddha did not blame the people who caused him suffering. There are people who have caused problems for the Buddha, like King Ajatasattu, like Devadatta. But the Buddha was able to help them. We are the students of the Buddha, why can't we follow in his path, in his footsteps? Why do we blame? Why do we discriminate? If we continue like that how can we advance in our everyday practice?

If we know how to look at things in the spirit of the Diamond Sutra, we can see the non-A elements in A, we can see the nature of interdependent origination behind the vikalpa . And when we discover the suchness of things, we are walking in the world of light, and we will not fall. If we don't have that way of looking, then we will walk in darkness, we will fall down and we will cause suffering for ourselves and for the other person. Subhuti, a bodhisattva who still depends on notions to practice generosity is like someone walking in the dark, he will not see anything. But when a bodhisattva does not depend on notions to practice generosity, he is like someone with good eyesight walking under the bright light of the sun, he can see all shapes and colours. (15)

"Subhuti, someone who wants to give rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind should do it in this way: 'We must lead all beings to the shore of awakening, but, after these beings have become liberated, we do not, in truth, think that a single being has been liberated' Why is this so? Subhuti, if a bodhisattva is still caught up in the idea of a self, a person, a living being or a life-span, that person is not an authentic bodhisattva."(17) We do not have the idea that we will help all beings to cross over to the other shore. If a bodhisattva thought he would help the other person to cross over to the other shore then he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being. "Subhuti, do not say that the Tathagata has the idea, 'I will bring living beings to the shore of liberation'. Do not think that way, Subhuti. Why? In truth there is not one single being for the Tathagata to bring to the other shore. If the Tathagata were to think there was, he would be caught in the idea of a self, a person, a living being and a life-span."(25) So, the same formula is repeating in many different aspects of the teaching.

"Subhuti, what the Tathagata calls a self essentially has no self in the way that ordinary persons think there is a self. Subhuti, the Tathagata does not regard anyone as an ordinary person. That is why he can call them ordinary persons." (25) There are people we tend to think of as "bad", but we are responsible to a certain degree for their actions or behaviours. If they are caught by drink or drugs, if they are caught up in crime, then we also are responsible to a certain degree. Because we have organised society in such a way, we have taken care of our young generation in such a way, that they will be caught into drugs, alcoholism or crime. If we look into those people who we think of as bad and if we see that they are us, they are our responsibility, then we know our part. And when we look at those people we will not blame them, we will not have enmity toward them, but we will have the will to help them. We know that they are that way because of their background, the situation of society. So we will not look down on them, we will only love them and we will take the responsibility upon ourselves.

If you read these sentences deeply, the Tathagata doesn't call them a "bad" person even though they behave in such a way. So there is love, there is deep understanding, there is no discrimination, no blaming. We know that that person is ourselves. Because we have not done our best, we have not tried our best to organise society, we have not done our best to help, and this is why those people have become like that. So A is not A, therefore it is true A.

"What do you think, Subhuti, can someone meditate on the Tathagata by means of the 32 marks?" There is a practice of visualisation based on the 32 marks of the Buddha. When we suffer, when we are sad, in despair or angry, we sit down and visualise the 32 marks of the Buddha, and we feel peaceful in ourselves. Many Buddhists practise this. Often when we are sad we go into the Temple and look at the Buddha, or we go and sit down at the foot of a tree and visualise the 32 beautiful marks of the Buddha. It seems that Subhuti has the tendency to practice this visualisation, that is why the Buddha asked this question and Subhuti answered very quickly "yes". But right afterwards he was also able to say "no". The Buddha said: "If you say that you can use the 32 marks to see the Tathagata, then the Cakravartin is also a Tathagata." Subhuti said, "World Honoured One, I understand your teaching, One should not use the 32 marks to meditate on the Tathagata." (26) We can see the 32 beautiful marks, but we should be able to see the Tathagata beyond his marks, we have to see the Tathagata everywhere. Then the World Honoured One said:

"Someone who looks for me in form

or seeks me in sound

is on a mistaken path

and cannot see the Tathagata."

This is a very beautiful gatha and very well-known. You should learn it in Chinese.

"Subhuti, if you think that the Tathagata realises the highest most fulfilled awakened mind and does not need to have all the marks, you are wrong."(27) This is an important point of the teachings of the Buddha. We have talked about many different pairs of opposite notions: coming and going, birth and death, that we must not get caught in marks. So we have the feeling that the form, the mark, is dangerous and we have to leave behind all the forms. But the form is important, the Buddha continues: "Subhuti, do not think in that way. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as non-existent, cut off from life. Please do not think in this way. The one who gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled, awakened mind does not contend that all objects of mind are non-existent and cut off from life."(27) So all the forms and marks are important for our practice, for our realisation. We need forms, but we are not caught in forms.

Please do not think that when we give rise to the highest most fulfilled awakened mind, we have to look at dharmas as annihilation. Throughout the last 2,600 years there have been many people, including some western Buddhist scholars, who think that this is what the Buddha taught, that our goal, our purpose is to go in the direction of total annihilation. But this is not true, please do not get caught into it. Many people have thought that the Buddha's teaching is one of annihilation, that its aim is non-existence, non-being. This is not true, this is not what the Buddha taught. Do not think that when one gives rise to the highest, most fulfilled awakened mind, one needs to see all objects of mind as non-existent, cut off from life. That is also being caught in a mark. So 'being' is a mark, but 'non-being' is also a mark. The Diamond Sutra is very clear. Why do we think that the teachings of Buddhism lead to annihilation?

We see that the rose is a mark. We say we should not get caught in the mark of the rose. However the mark of the rose is very important. Due to the mark of the rose we have the chance to look deeply into the non-mark of the rose. We look into the rose and we see the sunshine, the clouds, the earth, we see all of nature, we see the elements, the minerals, we see the sky, the people, we can see the whole cosmos through the mark of a rose. The mark of the rose is important in giving rise to our ability to look deeply. So please do not say that the rose is not there, we do not deny the existence of the rose. We read that there is "no eye, no ear, no nose, no tongue, no body or mind; no form, no sound, no smell, no taste, no touch, no object of mind." It doesn't mean those things do not exist. What we mean is that the form, the mark of those things is deceptive. So the mark helps us to practice looking deeply to see the non-A elements within A, and then we can see the true the A. So the mark is very important. The Buddha didn't say we must look for the non-mark, because non-mark is also a mark. The Tathagata doesn't throw away anything, does not try to escape anything. The Tathagata recognises all the forms, but he is not caught in any form, any mark. He has the capacity to look deeply into all the marks and to see all of the non-mark elements within the mark.

The Tathagata has insight and wisdom, and that can help him to liberate himself from anger, from blaming, from enmity. And therefore all the teachings of the Buddha are based on looking deeply. Looking deeply is meditation, looking deeply helps you to see the nature of suchness, the nature of interdependent origination. The more you look deeply the more you are able to liberate yourselves from the nature of discrimination, and you will get in touch with the nature of interdependent origination and see the nature of suchness.

"After they heard the Lord Buddha deliver this sutra, the Venerable Subhuti, the bhiksus and bhiksunis, laymen and laywomen and the gods and asuras, filled with joy and confidence, undertook to put these teachings into practice." (32)

(Thay has made extensive commentaries on this sutra in a book which has been translated into English: The Diamond That Cuts Through Illusion. Next time we will study the 10 Great Vows of Samantabhadra in the Avatamsaka Sutra. We can learn it in Chinese.)